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8-5-2011

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Recommended Citation

Adler, Rachel F. and Benbunan-Fich, Raquel, "A Typology of Positive and Negative Self-Interruptions in Voluntary Multitasking" (2011). *AMCIS 2011 Proceedings - All Submissions*. 64.
http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2011_submissions/64

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A Typology of Positive and Negative Self-Interruptions in Voluntary Multitasking

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ABSTRACT

Human multitasking is often the result of voluntary interruptions in the performance of an ongoing task. These self-interruptions occur in the absence of external triggers such as alerts or notifications. Compared to externally induced interruptions, self-interruptions have not received enough research attention. To address this gap, this paper develops a detailed classification of self-interruptions arising from positive and negative feelings regarding task progress and prospects of goal attainment. The validation of the proposed typology in an experimental multitasking environment with pre-defined tasks shows that negative feelings trigger more self-interruptions than positive feelings and that more self-interruptions produce more errors and lower accuracy in all tasks. Therefore, negative triggers of self-interruptions unleash a downward spiral that ultimately affects performance.

Keywords

Multitasking, Interruptions, Self-interruptions, Errors, Performance.